



# Kansas Immunization Program

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## Helping Parents Who Question Vaccines:

Most parents believe in the benefits of immunization for their children. However, health care providers may encounter parents who question the need for or safety of childhood vaccines. Such parents may choose to delay or forgo immunizing their children with some or all of the recommended vaccines. To assist parents in making fully informed immunization decisions, providers should try to understand differing views of vaccine risks and benefits, and be prepared to respond effectively to concerns and questions.

Effective, empathetic communication is critical in responding to parents who are considering not vaccinating their children. Parents should be helped to feel comfortable voicing any concerns or questions they have about vaccination, and providers should be prepared to listen and respond effectively. Based on findings from parents, providers should consider the following issues:

### **Ask Questions**

- Evaluate whether the child has a valid contraindication to a vaccine by asking about medical history, allergies, and previous experiences.
- Assess the parent's reasons for wanting to delay or forgo vaccination in a non-confrontational manner.
- If parents have safety concerns or misconceptions about vaccination ask them to identify the source of those concerns or beliefs.
- Listen carefully, paraphrase to the parent what they have told you, and ask them if you have correctly interpreted what they have said.

### **Respect and Address Concerns**

- Provide factual information in understandable language that addresses the specific concerns or misconceptions the parent has about vaccination.
- Use Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) for discussing vaccine benefits and risks. Before administering each dose of certain vaccines, providers are required by law to give a copy of the current VIS to the child's parents/legal guardian. Providers must also record in the child's chart the date that the VIS was given and the publication date of the VIS.
- Educate parents about the dangers of vaccine-preventable diseases and the risks of not vaccinating as they relate to the child, family and community.
- Express your personal support for vaccinations and share experiences you have had with children with vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Provide educational materials to be taken home and refer the parent to other credible sources of information.

### **Educate About Responsibilities**

- Inform parents who defer vaccination of their responsibilities to protect other family and community members, including people who may be immunocompromised.
- Parents also should be advised of state school or child-care entry laws, which might require that unimmunized children stay home from school during outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

### **Explore Acceptable Options**

- Explore whether the parent is willing to allow the child to receive certain vaccines, to be immunized on an alternative schedule or delay vaccination and "catch-up" if the parent changes his/her mind.

### **Keep Communication Open**

- Keep the lines of communication open with parents who choose to defer or who refuse vaccination by expressing your desire to talk more about vaccines during future visits.
- Periodically assess the parent's willingness to vaccinate their child, including at every well child visit. And document any refusal to vaccinate in the medical record.

### ***More Information***

Your state and local health department can provide you with information and resources regarding immunization. Also visit the CDC website for the most current information on immunization, tools to help educate parents, Vaccine Information Statements and more at [www.cdc.gov/nip](http://www.cdc.gov/nip). You may also contact or refer patients to the CDC Immunization Hotline (800) 232-2522 (English), (800) 232-0233 (Spanish).

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